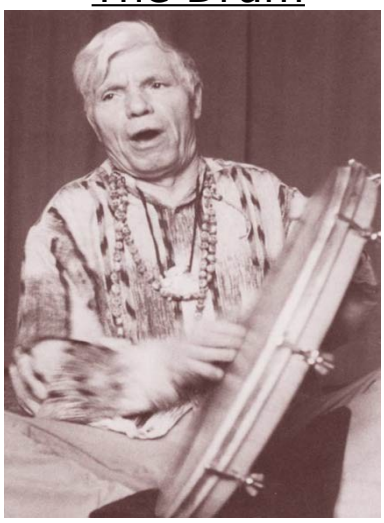
Shaman Joska Soos: My Shamanic Instruments

by Joska Soos, Hungarian shaman

Translated by Dirk Gillabel, 2014

This is an explanation of the shamanic instruments of Hungarian shaman Joska Soos, in his own words. The original text is in Dutch. I translated it from the book *Joska Soos, Ik Genees Niet, Ik Herstel de Harmonie* into English. I have added the illustrations, they are not from the book.

The Drum



Joska Soos playing his drum

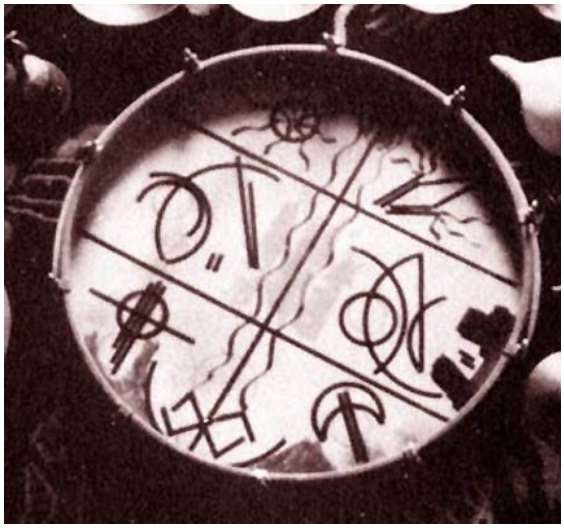
The most important instrument of the shaman is the drum. The drum symbolizes

the beating of the heart, both of man and the earth, because the earth also is a living organism. Beating of the drum gives the rhythm of the galloping horse carrying the shaman to the underworld or the world of the gods. In many traditions, the drum is called 'the horse'.
There are many stories. For example, a boy who has to achieve something great, or defeat a monster. When he arrives at the stable to get the horse, he finds a skinny and neglected horse. The body then asks an old man or woman for advise. They say: "You have to feed the horse." The boy gets some hay for the horse, but it doesn't want to eat. "What do you eat?" the boy asks. "I only eat burning coals", the horse answers. Thus, the boy brings him burning coals. The skinny horse eats them and it transforms into a large, strong and sometimes winged horse.
Many studies have been made to find the meaning of these stories. Actually, it is very simple. Shamans didn't use to have a drum with those metal screws, with which you can put the skin under tension. When the shaman used his drum a lot, the skin would become limp and the sound muted. To tighten the skin, he would hold his drum above the fire, and the heat would tighten the skin again. The horse symbolizes the drum, and the coals the fire. Therefore, in Hungary, shamans are also called taltosj [táltos], which signifies Pegasus, the winged horse that has eaten the burning coals.
On a personal level, the burning coals mean the inner warmth. We have three kinds of inner warmth: the humid warmth, the dry warmth and the radiating warmth. The humid warmth is the one you feel after exercising and you start sweating. The dry warmth is the feeling of heat, by which you get a dry mouth; no physical exercise is necessary. Radiating warmth is the flaming wood, the mystical or magical warmth which radiates from the body. Radiating warmth is related to our fluidic system, to the meridians of acupuncture. That is the warmth the shaman tries to create when he shamanizes. However, also artists and other creative people can feel this. One has the feeling one is being irradiated, but from the inside out.
This warmth finds its origin primarily in the soft organs, like the liver, the lungs, the kidneys, the stomach. That you can notice with yourself or with somebody else. This warmth can slowly be raised by exercises. The intensity can vary, but it can also be too intense.
When I shamanize, I can feel this warmth rising within a few seconds. Then I have to balance the wheel of the right side, of the water, the female, with the wheel of the left side, of the fire, the male. Shamanism, and other religions, tell us that we have a double wheel of energy inside of us. The left side is the activity, the male energy, which turns from left to right. The female wheel, or energy, turns from right to left. One is fire, activity, the male; the other is water, the nurturing, the female.
The activity of the heat can be raised, but only if the other side, the water, is being raised as well. It is the same principle with an atomic reactor. This has to be cooled otherwise it will explode. That is the same with humans.
Shamans know this in the form of shaman sickness. When the inner heat or radiating becomes too strong, then inner bleeding can happen, and other

disturbances, and even cancer. I have experienced this myself twice. The first time my gums and tongue began to bleed. It wasn't that bad, and I considered it a warning. However, the second time it was much worse, just at a time when i thought it would not happen to me. Luckily, the blood coagulated quickly, but after two days, I had blisters all over because the blood vessels had ruptured. My head itched like it was being invaded by bugs, and I was feeling miserable.
My legs, up to my thighs, were blue, and my feces contained blood; I must have had internal bleeding as well. i was completely exhausted. Then I remembered the words of Tamas Bacsi [his shaman-teacher]: "When the fire burns you, you have to lie down and drink water, lots of water, and more water.
My friends urged me to go to the hospital, but instead I shamanized. While I was singing, I concentrated on the wheel of the female, the cooling energy of the right side. I am absolutely convinced that if I had taken the medicines from a doctor that the bleeding would have stopped, but the cause would have remained, and it would have hit my most sensitive organs. Maybe it would have caused leukemia. What happened was that the radiating warmth expanded the blood vessels, especially the fine ones. The body then reacts by cooling, and you get the shivers. The heart beat increases, blood pressure rises, and the blood is being pumped through the fine blood vessels. This causes the blisters and internal bleeding. Therefore, the spiritual man have to give, in order to release this warmth. His intention and goodness have an egoistic goal: not to burn himself. Like the burning bush that did not consume, man must give his excess energy, otherwise he will burn himself.
In many cases this is the origin of cancer. One can warm oneself by spiritual things, but also by greed, love for money, power, desire. These also create warmth, just as a hyper lifestyle. People usually do not notice because they start smoking and drinking, and this makes them insensitive. They also have so many social duties and entertainment that they do not notice what is happening in themselves.
This excess heat will hit the weakest organ. That is the reason why cancer can hit any part of the body. The cause is not that far away. It is 'high tension'. Not only the outside energy. One can have the appearance of a calm person, but inside he is a volcano. A business man, for example, can appear to be a stable and quiet person, but inside he can be thinking constantly, day and night.
The cause of cancer does not need to be found in many areas. Primarily, it has one cause: excess heat and the poor distribution of it. it is possible that this heat can have a physical, psychological and psychic origin, which can confuse the symptoms. Cancer can be healed by a more natural approach like acupuncture, homeopathy, or certain physical or meditative exercises. Surgery and chemotherapy are useful, but they do not remove the cause. When surgery was successful, the disease often returns in another part of the body. If this not happens, what is the cause? Surgery has taken such a toll on the body that one has to take it much calmer, and thus the radiating energy has become much less. Doctors tell us that the surgery was a success, but why does it work with one person but not with the other? How can it afflict another part of the body? That they cannot explain.

My drum has a diameter of 50 cm. It's an initiated drum , that is to say it has been initiated with a special ritual, during which the potentialities of the shaman arise in the form of images. These images, for example, a certain tree or an animal, give by themselves strength, and can be called upon. In this way guardian spirits can also present themselves. When I had my drum inaugurated in 1976 there were immediately five guardian spirits, and a few weeks later there were two more. Now there are twenty-seven.
This initiation can occur at three levels; initiation to knowledge, initiation to be able to do, and initiation to come into contact with one's own potentiality. There are other possible initiations such as the initiation of the fourth dimension or a parallel universe, but in the present context the initiation of the drum serves to evoke the images of the potentialities, just like in the East they call up the image of the mandala.

2. Painting the drum



The bottom of Joska Soos' drum is at the top of the image. Polaris star is at the bottom of the picture.

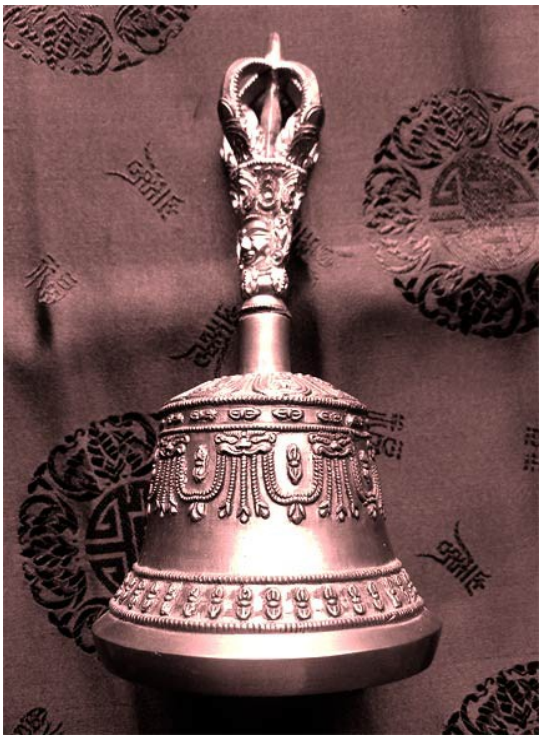
My drum is painted like every shaman drum. Horizontally, there are three areas, under the earth, on the earth and above the earth. At the lowest level, under the earth, and under the water, is the fire that is represented by the primeval atom, and instead of water, a water animal, a polyp, has been painted.
At the level of the earth are the people. I have made an ideogram of a man and a woman.
Above it is the sky, the sun is above the man and the moon is above the woman. The sky is really the superconscious, the subterranean is the subconscious and the middle plane is our human consciousness.
The highest levels are indicated by the Polaris star. The Polaris star represents the seventh chakra. Here you see a wheel in the form of a double swastika, one side turns from right to left, the other from left to right.
In the middle is a vertical axis that is the harmony, the backbone of man, and the

line of his development. Because horizontal knowledge is infinite, but true knowledge is vertical, connecting with upstairs and downstairs. The vertical line is the axis, the harmony and the spine. On the religious level, it is the tree of life, and on the cosmic level it is the cosmic tree, which runs from the human to the Polaris star and then even further. In shamanism, the Polaris star was considered the great door to the divine.
We need to focus on only the sun and the moon, as you have a sun cult and a moon cult. Because there is also a higher cult, the cult of the stars and especially the Polaris star. That cult existed long ago and was forgotten later on.
The energy comes from both sides down, left and right, coming together in the sacrum and goes from there through the axis upwards. That is the cycle of the two wheels, and the three levels. That's why I always say that you must work on the total human: body, soul and mind, the conscious, subconscious and superconscious.
On the drum are also the five colors. On the left, the female side, is the color black, the symbol of the earth, on right side the white color of foamy waves, which is the male. Above is the blue color of the sky and below the red color of the fire. The fifth element is the yellow color of the mind or the sun, the power that makes everything experience.

3. Rattles

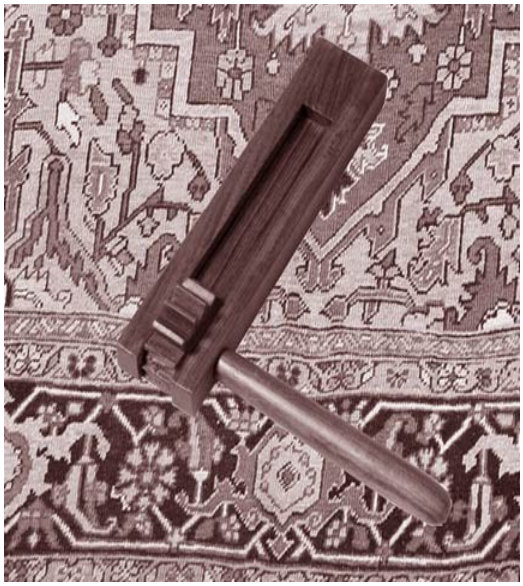
The drum, as an instrument, is connected to the earth. The rattles are water. I have two rattles: a heavy one that symbolizes the heavenly water, the rain that falls down, the male water; and a light one that symbolizes the female, earthly water, the river and lakes.

4. The Bell



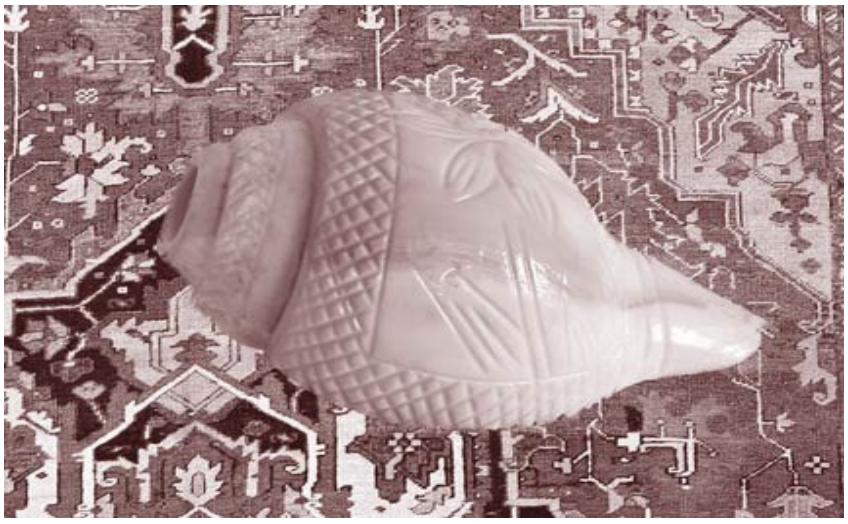
The air is symbolized by the bells. Shamans often wore little bells on their clothing. The air is the realm of the spirits. With the sound of bells spirits were called, or scared away. The bells are in existence since the iron age. Therefore, the air was also symbolized by the flute. There are three kinds of flutes which represents different states of mind. When one hears a shepherd's flute, then this affect the first and second chakra, sometimes also the third and fourth. This is a sign that the human emotions and feelings are of order. The pan flute is the connection of the earth with heaven, because we know that Pan was a demigod. When someone hears this flute, and he is concerned with this connection. The third flute is the crystal flute, or the jade flute. Its sound reaches the highest spheres of the spirit, the sound of angels. That is why, in Christian iconography, the angels are depicted with trumpets. When someone hears this sound, he knows he is in connection with the highest spheres.

5. The Ratchet



The element fire is represented by the sound of the ratchet. This is the sound of a fire. Shamans have been using it since time immemorial to frighten evil spirits, which are afraid of fire, just like the animals.

6. The Conch Shell



The fifth element is the human sound, symbolized by the conch shell. Blowing on a conch shell is the primal sound. At the same time it is the human breath, the spirit that vivifies everything. This can also be symbolized by the horn, as with the Tibetans, and with the Jews who blow on a ram's horn with certain rituals.

7. Singing Bowls

I also play the Tibetan singing bowls. Long time ago, before Buddhism came to Tibet, there was the bon-religion. This was a shamanistic and animalistic religion which used a lot of rituals and singing. When in the eighth century Buddhism came to Tibet, it fused with the original shamanic religion. That was a good connection, because shamanism was very extrovert, action oriented, and Buddhism was more meditative. They united into Lamaism. This gave a more total form to the human seeking towards harmony.
In this way the singing bowls are connected with shamanism. They are made from seven different metals. They contain gold for the sun, silver for the moon, mercury for Mercury, copper for Venus, iron for Mars, tin for Jupiter, and lead for Saturn. According to the teaching, each metal has seven kinds of sounds or vibrations. Therefore, each bowl contains seven multiplied by seven, 49 different sounds. One has to try to distinguish them, and to let them work on oneself.
One can simply listen, and hit them and listen. One can also rub a bowl with a stick by which the bowl starts 'singing'. You can also feel the bowl and absorb the vibrations this way; or hold your tong against a bowl to receive the vibration in a more intense way.
The purpose is that after a while you feel the vibration, even when you simply think of it; and that you can experience the sound in your mind independent of the instrument.
As long as you are not able to do that, it is good to have such a bowl, because that can save time and hasten the process.
The singing bowls are very old, they date back before Lamaism. Two years ago, there was a large exposition of Tibetan ritual objects in the British Museum. On display were two medium-sized bowls from an archaeological excavation in 1938, and which had been cleaned recently. The excavation had taken place nearby an ancient Bon temple. Scientific research showed that the bowls were from 2400 B.C. This shows that the bowls were already used in that time, in Tibet.
Only monks who especially used sound had those bowls. For the rest it was a secret, because they were not used in ordinary rituals. One day, when I asked a high ranking Tibetan lama if he knew these bowls were really used, he answered: "Maybe."
When the Chinese invaded Tibet, they destroyed almost all fourteen thousand

monasteries, only seventeen were spared. The Chinese have taken away all valuables from these monasteries, and they sold it later in Shanghai and other places. In this way, the bowls arrived at antiquarians and collectors.
In Japan, they also use similar big bowls, but they only hit them and don't really play them. Although they are present in Zen Buddhism, they probably came from the much older Shinto religion, which also dates back to old shamanic rituals.
In many religions, sound has an important function. In the old temple at Jerusalem, Jews were singing day and night. Each hour, twelve Levites sang to praise god, and they would alternate.
It is said that in the monasteries on the mountain Athos, the Greek orthodox monks have been singing uninterrupted since the sixth century. In this way the harmony in the individual, but also on Earth is being maintained.